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The communist party and
industrial unionism

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THE
COMMUNIST PARTY
and
INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

by
G. ZINOVIEV

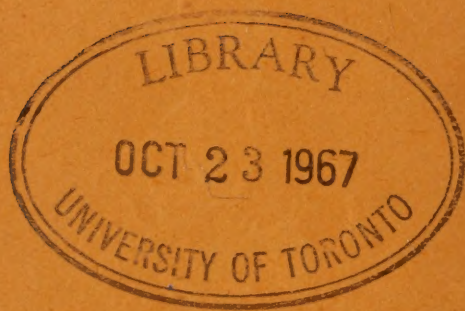
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The Communist Party

and

Industrial Communism

The Purpose and Structure of Industrial Organisation.

To arrive at a clear understanding of the proper relationship of the Communist Party and the workers' industrial organisations, one must first examine the purpose and structure of industrial organisation.

According to Webb, the aim "is to maintain and increase the standard of wages." Brentano and Sombart say that the object is "to subsidise the members in time of strike, and to safeguard their interests by increasing their wages."

The Bolshevik* Party has never given its adhesion to these phrases. It has never approved the formula generally accepted by the Second International. This was defined by a well-known Austrian militant industrialist, Adolf Braun, as the organisation of the workers "in permanent craft or Trade Unions of wage earners, with the object of securing ameliorations of working conditions within the limits of the capitalist system, and to fight within those limits to prevent conditions growing worse."

In its controversy with the Mensheviks in 1913, the Bolshevik* Party laid down that

* Now the Communist Party of Russia.

the workers should be organised in a Union covering the entire industry, not merely a sectional craft trade within the industry.

The Communist Party declared that the Industrial Unions should conduct the economic fight of the workers, and should constantly collaborate with the workers' political party in the working-class struggle for emancipation, the abolition of wage slavery, and the victory of Socialism.

For this reason the Bolshevik Party has never considered the Industrial Union as an organisation aspiring only to secure some reforms and ameliorations of working conditions within the limits of capitalist society. On the contrary, the Bolshevik Party, in complete accord with the doctrine of Marx, has always seen that the Industrial Union is one of the most important organisations of the working class; one that has been created for the fight for Socialism in intimate collaboration with the political party, and one that, in consequence, is favourable to the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Since 1913 important changes have come about in Russia. The power has passed into the hands of the working class. The bourgeoisie has been expropriated; the workers are no longer obliged to sell their labour power to the divers exploiting employers.

If we consider that fact, it immediately becomes clear to us that the functions of the Industrial Unions in Russia are subject to important modifications.

A Statement by the All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions.

The resolution adopted at the First All-Russian Congress of Trade Unions in 1918 is as follows:—

"The October Revolution, which transferred the power from the bourgeoisie to the workers and poor peasants, has created entirely new conditions for all the workers' organisations, and especially for the Industrial Unions.

"Under the changed conditions, the industrial organisation can no longer be regarded as the advance guard of the fight put up by the worker in selling himself to the employer. The employer who used to buy labour power of old, exists no more. It is no longer necessary for the Unions to collect strike funds or to organise strikes."

The Present Functions of Russian Trade Unions.

What are the real functions of the industrial organisations in Russia to-day?

The same resolution of the First All-Russian Congress of Industrial Unions says on this point:—

"The Unions must now transfer their centre of gravity to economic reconstruction."

To explain what an industrial organisation really is under the conditions now obtaining in Russia, one is first obliged to make clear that:—

"An Industrial Union in Russia to-day is a permanent union of all the workers in a given industry; it represents one of the principal bases of the organisation of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat.

"The Industrial Union to-day (under the guidance of the Communist Party) transfers its centre of gravity to the domain of economic organisation, by making its aim an energetic participation in all the efforts of the workers for a Communist reconstruction of society and for the abolition of social classes. This participation takes the following forms:—

"(1) General co-operation in the organisation of production on a Communist basis.

"(2) The re-establishment of the productive power of the country, which was destroyed by the War and the internal crisis.

"(3) The calculation and re-distribution of labour for the entire country.

"(4) The organisation of the exchange between town and country.

"(5) The introduction of the obligation to work.

"(6) Helping the State Departments to provide food.

"(7) Helping to solve the fuel crisis and other difficulties.

"(8) Giving general aid to the formation of the Red Army.

"(9) Defending the economic interests of the workers, and at the same time fighting against the individualist tendencies, and the short-sighted views of that section of the workers which, because of its ignorance, still retains the habit of regarding the Proletarian State of to-day as though it were the old employer.

"Because the industrial organisations of to-day are the Communist schools of the proletarian and semi-proletarian masses, they have become, little by little, an integral part of the general mechanism of the State. They are one of the organs of the State of working people who submit to the rule of the Soviets because the Soviets are the vehicle indicated by history for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat."

The Communist Party and the Soviets.

The Industrial Unions work in conjunction with the Communist Party and the Soviets. The activities of these three institutions are

closely linked. To make clear the mutual relations of these bodies, it must be remembered that the Soviets actually include larger masses than the Industrial Unions themselves; also that the Soviets have taken over part of the functions of the Industrial Unions.

The Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party has given the following definition of the Party and of the Soviets:—

“The Soviets are the State organisations of the workers and poor peasants which effectuate the Dictatorship of the Proletariat during the period when the State in all its forms is gradually being extinguished. The Soviets unite within their ranks ten million workers, and, little by little, must strive to include the entire class of workers and poor peasants,

“The Communist Party, on the other hand, is an organisation which takes in only the advance guard of the workers and poor peasants; only that part of these two classes which fights consciously for the practical application of the Communist programme. The aim of the Communist Party is to obtain a preponderating influence and complete control of all the workers’ organisations, the Industrial Unions, the Co-operatives, the rural Communes, and so on. The Communist Party strives specially to introduce its programme into the actual organisations of State—the Soviets—and to obtain complete control there. No doubt can exist that in the future the various existing organisations of the workers will be finally united in one form. It is useless to speculate to-day as to which form will prove the most durable. Our present duty is to determine precisely the mutual relations which should exist between the Communist Party, the Industrial Unions, and the Soviets.

The Theory of the Equality of Rights.

Even amongst the more hopeful section of the old International, the opinion was very prevalent that the Communist Party on the one hand, and the Industrial Unions on the other hand, were organisations of equal value—having the same rights—organisations which collaborate on important questions of all kinds, like two contracting parties. The Socialist Party should control the political side, whilst the Industrial Unions controlled the economic side. Thus, for example: the German Social-Democrats passed a resolution, supported even by August Bebel, stating that if it should ever be necessary to employ the weapon of the general strike, this question could only be decided by a conference between the Executive of the Party and the general committee of the Trade Unions.

From the Communist viewpoint this opinion cannot be recognised. The equality of rights* theory has always been disputed by the revolutionary Marxians.

From the revolutionary Marxian viewpoint, the Communist Party is the ultimate re-union of all phases of the struggle of the working-class for freedom from the capitalist yoke. The Communist Party makes use of a whole arsenal of arms to win this fight. The political struggle is indissolubly bound up with the economic struggle. The Communist

* In Britain the theory that the political and industrial organisations of the workers should together decide the question of a general strike, as bodies possessing an equal right to decide is not that generally held. It is usually contended in this country that the industrial bodies alone must decide such an issue. This is a comfortable theory for those who do not wish to accept the responsibility of organising for action. The German developments are another proof that the industrial organisations do not take the initiative when it is a question of revolutionary action.

Party shows the way for the economic as well as the political struggle. The Communist Party is the advance-guard of the proletariat. By the torch of Communism it lights up all the turnings of the road leading to the emancipation of the workers. On this account, the work which the Communists are doing in the Industrial Unions is but a fraction of the work which the Communist Party, as such, is doing.

During a period of dictatorship like that we in Russia are now passing through, one can still less think of any compromise with the equality of rights theory. The least deviation in this direction must be strenuously fought, in theory as well as in practice.

The "Non-Party" Trade Unions.

The present Industrial Unions are not necessarily under the Communist Party. All workers, both men and women, are received into them irrespective of their party or creed. A worker who does not belong to the Party has the full right to join our Industrial Unions. But on that account, Communists who work in the Industrial Unions should not fail to pay attention to the conservative character of the members who do not belong to the Party. The Communists, and the Communist group, in the Industrial Unions must preach Communism openly. The leaders of the Industrial Unions must constantly draw the attention of the workers to this fact, that the enemies of Communism, not belonging to the Party, are trying to deceive them. They should explain to the workers why the Industrial Unionists, whilst they are not formally members of our Party, always help the Communist Party, recognising the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, and de-

fending the Power of the Soviets and the World Revolution.

The Modern Trade Union Movement.

The modern Industrial Unions are doing an enormous work, and they greatly facilitate the struggle for Socialism made by the Communist Party and the Soviets. But, at the same time, there is, during our transition, a dark side to the activity of the Industrial Unions. For example, some branches of the Dock Labourers' Union on the Volga support the wage demands of their short-sighted individual members (without even having helped the Soviets in their fight against the incredible thefts which have been committed by the dockyard workers); they prove that they are very much behind the times, and that they are incapable of rising above the narrow interests of their group. When certain associations of clerks and other similar commercial associations introduce people into the Soviet institutions, who are not fit to do the work which is entrusted to them, and when these associations take up the demands of their members, forgetting that they no longer have to deal with employers, but with the Proletarian State, they also prove their Trade Union narrowness. The fight against the negative parties of the working-class movement is one of the chief duties of the Communists in the Industrial Unions.

Concessions to Industrialism.

At a time when the best elements in French Syndicalism are abandoning their former errors, and moving towards Communism in laying down the principle: "All power to the Workers' Councils," there are working-class groups and circles in Russia which are trying to revive the worst features

of syndicalism. The famous Left-Wing Social Revolutionary Party recently adopted a resolution demanding the transfer of the whole administration of industry and transport to the Central Committee of the Industrial Unions. It further proposed that common action should be taken by that committee and the industrial organisations of the whole world for the entire management of the Social Revolution and the world control of industry and transport by a combine of Industrial Unions. The Communists who work in the Industrial Unions should strongly oppose syndicalist tendencies of this kind.

So-called "Industrialism."

It is equally necessary to turn against the tendencies known by the name of "industrialism," which are defended by some members of the Russian working-class movement who are members of the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Metallurgical Union.

The industrialists want to erect our entire edifice on the skilled workers, and to put aside the whole mass of unskilled workers. Doubtless the War and the Revolution have led to many fundamental changes in the social structure of the proletariat itself. There is no possible doubt about that. The factory worker of to-day is certainly the most developed of the proletariat. But in no case can it be the task of the Communists, men of the working-class, only to elect skilled workers, who form a minority of the working class. The Communist ideas have nothing in common with the propagation of the working-class aristocracy. On the contrary, the task of the Communists, of the people in the working-class movement, consists in helping the most advanced sections of the

industrial workers to organise, little by little, the whole mass of the proletariat, including the unskilled workers, and to include them in the constructive work of the State. The policy of industrialism, which at first sight appears to be radical, is, in practice, only the opportunist policy of the leaders of the working-class aristocracy. When all is said and done, this policy will be the same as that of the social-traitors.

State Trade Unions.

The All-Russian Trade Unions Congress, in January, 1918, declared its conviction that the process which is taking place in the Trade Unions will lead to their transformation into Departments of the Socialist State, and, at the same time, Trade Union membership will be a State obligation for all the workers who belong to the same branch of industry." (Par. 9 of the resolution.)

This conviction of the All-Russian Congress is based on facts. The Industrial Unions are gradually assuming the attributes of State Departments. They really work as a veritable Department of the State when they mobilise all their members, when they concentrate workers in a given town, when they transfer the workers from one part of Russia to another, when they give their vote on a question of wages, when they exercise, by means of their representatives, a decisive influence on the activity of the Supreme National Economic Council.

And just because this transformation of Industrial Unions into State Departments takes place gradually, and quite normally, there is no present necessity of forcing this process, there is no need to proclaim from one minute to another the transformation of Industrial Unions into State Departments.

The Communists who work in the Industrial Unions have every reason for adhering to the resolution of the First and Second All-Russian Trade Unions' Congress in this matter.

Groups, Trade Unions and Local Branches of the Party.

In every Industrial Union there should be a Communist section, strongly organised and disciplined in order that each section may propagate the same economic policy as that of the Central Communist group, which is in the All-Russian Trade Unions' Council. No concession to what is called "Localism" should be made. Wages, hours of labour, food questions and so on should all be considered from the all-Russian point of view. Each Communist group within an Industrial Union is merely a kernel of the local branch of the Communist Party. The local committee of the Party completely dominates the Industrial Union branch of the town, whilst the Central Committee of the Party controls, by its dominating influence, the All-Russian Committee of the Industrial Unions.

The Communist Party is the force to be counted on in mobilising the workers for industry, and for the Red Army. The Committee of the Party comes to an understanding with the Communist groups in the Industrial Unions. The Communist Party directs all the constructive side of the Trade Union activity, but it takes care that this direction shall never be of a domineering character.

Organisation of the Rural Worker.

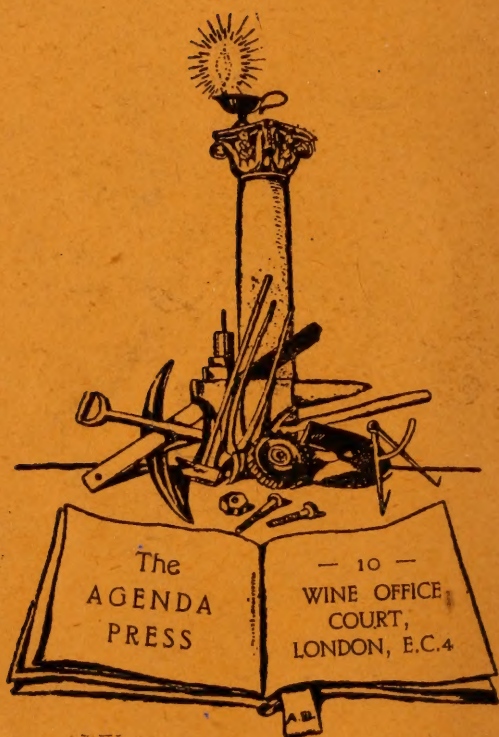
One of the most important tasks of the working-class movement at present in Russia is the organisation of the rural workers. It

is necessary to help the already existing organisations of the workers by all possible means. The Communists working in the working-class movement should consider it an honour to organise the rural workers. This task requires a good deal of energy and power.

The Trade Unions and the International.

In consequence of certain peculiarities in the evolution of the working-class movement in Western Europe, a false conception exists about the Trade Unions amongst the German Communists and the Communists of other countries. Our Party believes that we cannot do without the Trade Unions. During the proletarian revolution, the Trade Unions will split up in the same way as the old Social-Democratic Parties have done. The experiences of the German working-class movement showed us that already the Berlin Trade Unions are freeing themselves from the pernicious influence of the social-democracy of Scheidemann.

The Russian Trade Union movement should take the initiative in creating a Red Trade Union International, in the same way as the political party has done in the political field. At the Congress of the Red International, not only should the organisations of the Party be represented, but also the organisations of the Workers' Councils, the Co-operative Societies, and the Communist Trade Unions which approve of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Soviets. Meantime, it is necessary to create an International Union of the Trade Unions, which already take their stand in the Communist International.



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